



The Role of the United States in the Global Climate Emergency

The United States (U.S.) is one of 196 parties signing the Paris Agreement, the first legally binding international treaty on climate change. The goal of the Paris Agreement is to hold “the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” and pursue efforts “to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.” Each nation-signer has submitted national climate action plans, but very few countries have achieved their own goals, and stronger goals will be needed by everyone to avoid the consequences of temperature increase above 1.5°C.

The U.S. government and the U.S. economic system (U.S. corporations and banks, in particular) have played an especially negative role in creating and responding to the climate emergency. They have deceived the U.S. people about the reality of climate change and have continued to engage in practices that worsen the climate emergency. President Trump withdrew the U.S. from the Paris Agreement in 2017, undermining global efforts to handle the climate emergency and setting back U.S. progress toward reducing U.S. emissions. (The U.S. rejoined the Paris Agreement in 2020 under President Biden.) As a major economic

power and the second largest source of global greenhouse gas emissions (historically the largest), U.S. action is vitally important.

Scientific reports make it clear that climate change is a global disaster in the making and will get progressively worse until it is addressed. Because global efforts to address the climate emergency have been late and inadequate, the problem is now so large that it will take significant resources and collective action to address it fast enough to avoid catastrophic consequences. According to these reports, we have a very small window of time in which to make large reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Recently U.S. emissions have leveled off, now it is important that they fall rapidly. The Paris target for the U.S. is to reduce emissions by 50% by 2030.

In contradiction to its Paris commitments, the U.S. government continues to support the U.S. fossil fuel industry in expanding the production of fossil fuels. The U.S. is the world’s largest oil and gas producer and third largest coal producer. Far more coal, gas, and oil are already being produced than we can burn and still stay below 2°C. Continued production and use will be catastrophic.



The U.S. government (working with the U.S. fossil fuel industry) undermines efforts to provide poorer nations with the resources needed to transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy and address the already devastating impact of climate change on their peoples and lands. These nations (who have had their own resources stripped away through colonialism and imperialism) have asked wealthy nations for faster action. They have asked for financial resources—to make their societies more climate resilient, address what they are already experiencing, and transition from fossil fuels to renewables. If they continue to rely on fossil fuels for their development, they will add to the

increase of greenhouse gas emissions. The U.S. also blocks international efforts to exclude the fossil fuel industry from the UN climate talks.

To avoid global catastrophe, the U.S. must do the following: stop relying on fossil fuels, devote significant resources to the transition to a renewable energy economy with net-zero emissions, and aid poorer nations in their efforts. If we delay, the cost of taking action in the future (if it is even possible to do so) would greatly exceed the cost of taking action now.

The U.S. economic system has conditioned its people to consume far more than they need in order to have good lives. This excess



Sustaining All Life (SAL) is an international grassroots organization working to end the climate emergency within the context of ending all divisions among people. *United to End Racism* (UER) consists of a wide diversity of people in many different countries, who are dedicated to eliminating racism in the world and supporting the efforts of all other groups with this goal. UER and SAL are projects of and use the tools of Re-evaluation Counseling. Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is a well-defined theory and practice that helps people of all ages and backgrounds exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from emotional harm resulting from oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging the release of painful emotions, people can heal old hurts and become better able to think, to speak out, and to organize and lead others in building a world in which human beings and other life forms are valued and the environment is restored and preserved. Re-evaluation Counseling currently exists in 95 countries.



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consumption adds significantly to our emissions. Only a small percentage of the world's population consumes at the U.S. level. A recent study shows that individual behavioral changes on a massive scale could reduce emissions between nineteen and twenty-five percent. These changes could include the following (not in order of priority): substituting other forms of transportation for gas-powered individual vehicles, electrifying our homes and cutting power usage, installing rooftop solar and solar water heaters or micro-wind, recycling, using energy efficient lighting and appliances, not purchasing items unless we have a real need for them, eating more plant-based foods and less animal protein, reducing food waste, and composting. Many people in the U.S. have the means take such action now.

Every country, every signer of the Paris Agreement, must take action to meet its obligations under the Paris Agreement, and work to strengthen our future commitments to reduce emissions to limit global temperature increase and bring temperatures back down below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels as quickly as possible.

To accomplish this goal, the United States government must do the following:

- Remain a signer of the 2015 Paris Agreement (reject candidates who would withdraw) and increase its commitment to it
- Carry out its financial commitments to the United Nations and to international climate financing entities, such as the Loss and Damage and Green Climate Funds
- Commit to policies and legislation that will require industries and other sectors of the economy to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions so the U.S. will be compatible with a 1.5° pathway. as required by the Paris Agreement (reduce emissions by at least 62%-65% below 2005 levels by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050). Then work toward accomplishing the U.S. "fair share" global mitigation effort of 195% below 2005 emissions levels.

- Stop all support for the exploration, development, and production of fossil fuels
- Commit large financial resources to exploring and carrying out natural carbon solutions
- Support a "conflict of interest policy" to ban fossil fuel industries from the UN climate talks

To accomplish this goal, U.S. industries must do the following:

- Convert from fossil fuel to renewable energy as rapidly as possible, without waiting for economic incentives to do so.
- Begin planning for an economy that is not based on unlimited growth. (Unending and unlimited growth has brought us to the current situation.)
- Adopt ethical and rational means to extract the minerals and other resources needed for the transition to a renewable energy economy, without reproducing the historically unjust dynamics of global resource exploitation

To accomplish this goal, the people of the United States must do the following:

- Organize to accomplish the actions above
- Overcome the conditioning that drives us to acquire and consume more than we need. (There are enough resources available for everyone to have a good life.)
- Decide to use resources rationally without waiting for governments and industries to give up their destructive policies. (Official leaders have so far failed to take enough action—we can and must take leadership.)
- Share our resources with those who are facing the crisis with insufficient resources. (We are all in this together.)





The Work of *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism*

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—if we make some very large changes in our economy and the lives we live in the next decade. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* believe the environmental crisis can be resolved only if we simultaneously address racism, genocide of Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on the groups targeted by these oppressions, and on other vulnerable populations (including populations of people who are elderly, disabled, and very young). Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of both climate change and racism.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we believe that the barriers to building a sufficiently large and powerful movement include (1) longstanding divisions (usually caused by oppression, and especially racism and classism) between nations and between groups of people, (2) widespread feelings that it's too late and any actions will be ineffective, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the climate emergency, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of our economic system. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* work to address these and other issues.

The role of oppression

The economic and political forms of our societies demand growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the earth. This results in exploitation and oppression. Oppressions (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) target everyone, inflicting tremendous injustices, limiting access to resources, and damaging the lives of billions of people. Once targeted by oppression, we tend to act toward others in ways that repeat the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the mental and emotional harm we experience is the result of this passing on of hurt. Though people are vulnerable to acting in oppressive

ways, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a person has been hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

The importance of healing personal harm

The mental and emotional harm done to us by oppression and other hurtful experiences interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the climate emergency.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other harmful behavior is neither quick nor easy work. Many of us resist this personal healing work. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the harm done to us by oppression. Some of us assume that we will never be free of this harm.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts and address barriers to effective organizing. We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing. By releasing emotional pain in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and racism.



Sustaining All Life



For more information, see:

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